

One could multiply examples of similar interest *ad infinitum* did space allow.

The book closes with—

IV. A list of adjectives used as specific names, with meanings, and

V. An excellent index.

The book is beautifully printed and well bound—in every way deserving of a place on the shelves of every botanist; the orderliness with which it is planned, together with the delightful clearness and conciseness of the language and the evident enthusiasm of the author for his subject, make this little work a pleasing contrast to most of the laborious and, too often, dry-as-dust *Dictionaries* or *Glossaries* of botanical terms.

K. R. H.

## THE LOST ART OF CONVERSATION.

THERE are many lost arts. The "twencent" genius can neither stain glass nor make likenesses in *cuire bouillie*. The "twencent" hostess has forgotten how to *tenir salon*, and where, oh, where, is the brilliant conversationalist?

In my youth I was frequently shown the portrait of an enchantress of the Georgian era. It was a beautiful face, but it was not that upon which those who had known her dwelt. "People used to come for miles to hear her talk," was always the triumphant conclusion of the catalogue of her perfections.

A history of the Art of Conversation would afford room for reflection. Originally it was the medium for all teaching and interchange of ideas. The Platonic dialogues and the schools of the peripatetic philosopher brought the art to perfection. The great man conducted his orchestration of thought and expression, setting the time for the whole, but he indulged in no dreary monologue and did not monopolize the conversation. Each man added his quota, all were free to express an opinion without false shame and each received due consideration. Even when laughed out of court as obviously ridiculous a

suggestion was carefully proved to be a fallacy before its dismissal. In the dark ages conversation, as such, perished. Hair-splitting disputations among the monkish "schoolmen," and chanted recitations of some warrior's deeds over the wassail bowl, were its only remaining shadows. Story-loving, story-telling, Italy kept the sacred lamps glimmering in the form of narration; but it needed the life-giving breath of the Renaissance to loose the bands of men's tongues. Erasmus and Sir Thomas More may have led the way, but they had many followers. In the reign of James I. we have the ever-delightful Selden's *Table-Talk*, and the dialogues in Shakespeare's plays show what a play of words and wit the men and women of his day were accustomed to and used familiarly.

Scandal eclipsed conversation for the greater part of the eighteenth century until Dr. Johnson revived it in the form of the monologue. Coleridge's uncontrolled dreary rhapsodies were hardly conversation, but they at least show us that listeners were to be had in those days. Of the glories of Holland House who shall speak? There, indeed, met coteries of lions, none so great as to dwarf all the others, none so insignificant that he could not "pay his scot and bear his lot."

And nowadays? According to the modern novel there are occasional meteors of the "Dodo" type, who pepper their talk with epigrams and audacities, and there are a few good after-dinner speakers among men like Mr. Chauncey Depew, but, oh, ye gods and little fishes, what of the others?

Go to any social function and listen to the talk, share in it too if you must! The opening gamut is invariably the weather, which leads to the state of the roads, so to cycling and the inevitable "free wheel," golf or hockey. Bridge, motors and photography will follow if there are both men and women present; if women only, then the luckless victim is dragged through the mill of clothes, servants, babies, or incipient love-affairs!

The modern young person does not even talk, it does not even ask questions, it plays games, and, when it cannot think of anything else to say, either flirts (like the miserable man in *Punch*) or sits in a silent lump reducing the hostess to despair. Sometimes this arises from mere laziness, but more often from sheer inability to find a subject and then say anything



worth listening to thereon, or from lack of general information and readiness to lead on and draw out those who would be worth listening to. Many a man and woman, who have much of real interest to share with their neighbours, shrink from speaking of the things they know about in public. And this from a two-fold cause. Firstly, they hate to be conspicuous, and know that if they really begin to talk the whole room full will stop and listen, and what was meant to be of interest to one becomes a tax upon all. This state of things, of course, is chiefly true of provincial society which still thinks that for two people to have any "private" conversation in public is either "bad form" or else "must mean something," for our country is still much as Jane Austin left it! The other cause of silence, or inane chatter, lies in the unwritten law "Thou shalt not talk shop." Far be it from any man or woman to attack a jaded and weary worker seeking relaxation and drive mind and thoughts back upon the treadmill from which they have but just escaped. But on the other hand, supposing the worker to be seeking sympathy for disappointment, or achievement, or fresh ideas, or merely an outlet for intense interest, it is indeed hard that they should be debarred from finding, as they might, intelligent and ready listeners. The causes of this parlous state of things are many. At first sight it would seem as if the old adage, "children should be seen and not heard," was largely responsible, for not having been permitted to discourse in public when young, they cannot do it with facility when mature. But herein is a paradox, it is the total relaxation of the "good old plan" which has bred a race of chatterers and not of debaters. When children were quiet they listened to their elders, and, though much was beyond their comprehension, yet much remained; they did not grow up ignorant of the current events, thoughts, and expressions. Where children, as is so often the case nowadays, monopolize all the talk, their minds and vocabularies remain unextended, and they receive no training in the social drill of polite attention. No one wants the parent to discourse "improving conversation" throughout the luncheon, or for the children to sit mum more interested in their food than anything else. But there is a happy medium, and the direction of the talk should not be entirely at the mercy of the little happenings of everyday. Browning tells us:

## THE LOST ART OF CONVERSATION.

"Young all lay in dispute,  
I shall *know* being old."

If we remembered the first line oftener there would be more hope of the second becoming true. Children, and often their elders too, would really be thankful to know what they really did think on many most great and important subjects. Nothing clears our views so much as the shock of discussion and the friction with other minds. To deny all opportunities for such helpful sorting and dusting of ideas by talking only of surface matters may be truly British, but is also undeniably "gubsy-minded."

Another form of conversation to which the rising generation might well be trained is that of narration. How often an adventure or a good story are ruined in the telling. Constant practice in condensation and expression will alone make a *raconteur*, and it is surely within our province to provide that practice and foster readiness of words and ideas.

The fundamental bases of conversation are then—firstly, a matter of interest or import to converse upon; secondly, a due allotment of the conversation; thirdly, the power of listening with interested attention; and fourthly, the art of expression when one's turn comes. Expression comprises not alone language and style but verbal distinctness and distinction.

Very few people ever acquire this largely because they never learn to read. They only extract the sense out of the words before them, but of expression or comparative value they have not the ghost of an idea. A child taught to read aloud with its head and lips working in co-ordination will choose its words with discretion and use them with reverence. Clearness and comparative loudness and pace are best and most easily learnt by acting, and therefore charades, etc., as not merely part of a child's fun, but also of its education. Acting therefore should not be allowed to degenerate into a dressed-up romp in which everyone screams at the top of their voice together, but should be spoken dialogue, and the best available of its kind.

Written literature has so largely superseded the spoken variety that to say of anyone "he speaks like a book," is a term of reproach implying priggishness. Why we should "keep all our best things for our books" I do not know, though perhaps it explains why authors in the flesh are often



so notoriously dull. To abstain from casting our pearls before swine may be excellent in theory, and I will concede that there are subjects too holy and sacred and private to cheapen to the crowd. But our best pearls of expression are not likely to be too good even for our fellow-creatures—we so often mistake our grains of corn for pearls, and corn is very fattening for pigs!

The following suggestion is a last desperate attempt to restore conversation to at least some place in our social functions. We have had "book teas" and "celebrity teas" and "photograph teas," why not try a "conversation tea"? Let each guest arrive labelled with the subject on which he or she is prepared to converse with the greatest readiness. Let the hostess shuffle duplicate cards in a bag and then draw them out in pairs—as, let us say, "The present state of the Marriage Laws," and "Old English part-singing." The persons representing these subjects then retire into two chairs together, and, at the expiration of half-an-hour, each person will be asked how many points of agreement (or disagreement) they have found. The proud possessor of the greater number of points carrying off the now inevitable prize. It might lead to the formation of a regular debating society where men, women, and children might meet as souls, minds, or spirits without odious social complications—it might lead to everyone becoming very bored and saying "Oh, can't we have Bridge now?" Our tongues are often the busiest parts of ourselves—is it too much to plead that we should seek to revive the art of its use and endeavour to cultivate its activities?

R.A.P.

*Pennethorne*

## SPORT.

THERE is perhaps no ideal so universal to boyhood as that of becoming a "sportsman"—no term that so aptly describes a boy's hero, comprising all the virtues, powers, and ideals to which he aspires. What do we women understand by the word? A "sportsman" is a man who always does the straight thing, who knows no fear, physical or moral, who is in all things keen.

"A thorough sportsman." What a picture of an upright, healthy, vigorous, loyal Englishman the words call up! A man whose sense of fair play forms an integral part of his life, who is quite as ready to own himself wrong as he was to prove himself right. Whose love for all living things, and tenderness for all young things, is not one whit lessened by a cheerful capacity for killing, in a most workmanlike manner, pheasants in October and rats all the year round.

A man who plays all games to win, including the game of Life. Who loses without bitterness and wins without pride. A man capable in much, modest in all. What an ideal for a boy! What a citizen for a country! Such we would make our boys—such we would keep them. But all these virtues I have cited have not much surface connection with "sport." Sport means horse-racing, and grouse-driving and salmon fishing, and yachting and hunting, and guns and gloves and flies, and pink papers and check suits, and unintelligible slang, and half a page in the morning daily.

But to our sportsmen it means more. It means hard living and clean thoughts. Keen observation and many truths humbly learnt therefrom. It means self-control, that keystone to the arch of a good life. Physical control, the result of a body trained and kept in training; eyes and hands and legs and back each answering promptly to the brain's command. Moral control that regards the least deviation from the path of honour and truthfulness as impossible. Mental control that keeps purity of thought as much a matter of course as healthiness of body. Perhaps not brilliant, but